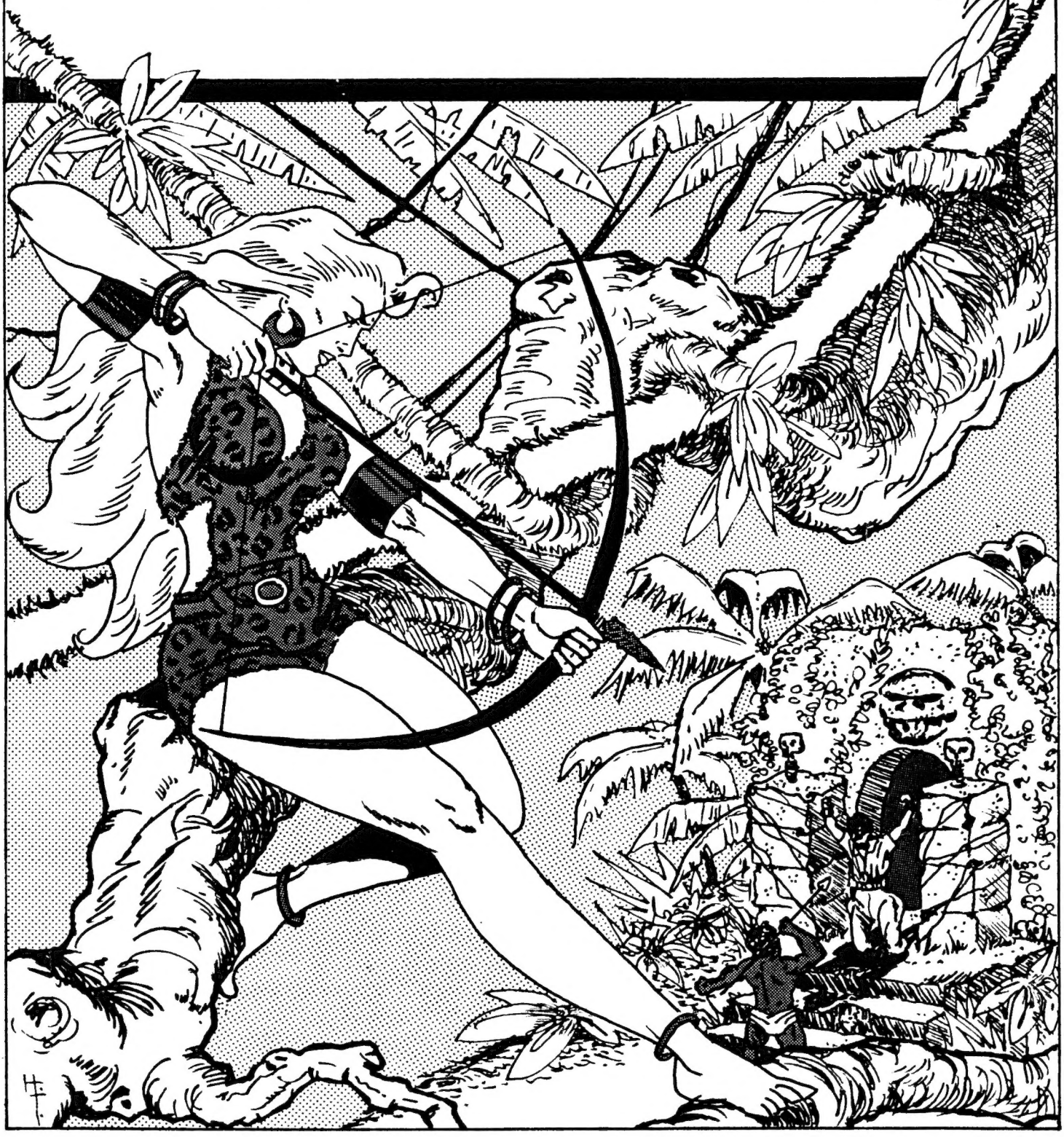
#16

the COMIC WORLD



SHEENA Queen of the Jungle

by

Robert Jennings

illustrations by Harry Thomas

"Many moons ago...a white man, such as you,
wandered into our land. With him he brought a
little white girl, with hair the color of corn..."

In the summer of 1938 an event took place which was to become a focal point in the development of the American comic book. JUMBO COMICS #1 appeared, dated September 1938, but out on the stands several months earlier. It was produced by Fiction House, an established magazine publisher, and marked their first entrance into the growing comics field.

There are only a handful of comics that can be called truly significent, and that first issue of JUMBO COMICS is one of them. The book was created and packaged for Fiction House by the recently formed art studios of William Eisner and S.M. "Jerry" Iger. They made a business of turning out original characters and strips for the expanding comics industry, and their staff included people like Bob Powell, Lou Fine, Jack Kirby, Bob Kane, Dick Briefer, Mort Meskin, Bernard Bailey and many more; a unique combination of artistic and writing talent such as the comics field had never seen before, and would probably never see again. The enormous talents of these individuals soon dramatically shaped the style and look of the comics, and their influence is still being felt even today, forty long years later.

Eisner and Iger first met several years before on production of another comic book, a McKay/Henle publication with the unlikely title of WOW WHAT A MAGAZINE! It was susposed to be a mix of newspaper strip reprints and original material, and Jerry Iger was in charge of production. The first issue appeared in May 1936, and even for a period when comic books were young and original comics of any kind were something of a novelty, WOW WHAT A MAGAZINE! was not a spectacular effort. In fact WOW only managed to struggle along for four issues all total before keeling over dead with the November 1936 number. Despite it's lack of commercial success, WOW was important because it brought Iger in contact with a group of bright and eager young artists who liked comics and enjoyed pro-

ducing them, notably William Eisner, and several others who would form the core of the Iger-Eisner shop operation.

In 1937, a few months after WOW's demise, Iger and Eisner formed a partnership, creating Universal Pheonix Features Syndicate, for the production of original newspaper strips, preferably Sunday style newspaper strips, for distribution to foreign newspapers. The actual sales and distribution were to be handled thru the Editors' Press Service, headed by Joshua Powers. It is difficult to understand today why this would ever have beened like a great business oppertunity. Producing American style comic strips was probably a hell of a lot easier than finding someone willing to pay good money for them overseas. Neither Iger nor Eisner has ever commented on this aspect of their business partnership in any detail, but one can probably assume that the financial rewards at this stage of the game were shallow, at best.

Luckily however, the domestic comic book market was developing rapidly. Within a very short period of time the studio staff found themselves producing comic strips for the newly created Quality Comics Group, whose first title appeared in 1937, and also whipping out pages to be used in CIRCUS COMICS which came out, and died, in 1938. There were also ocassional sales to the various Centaur books. Then in 1938 Iger sold the package deal to Fiction House. It must have seemed like a real God-send. Not only would it mean another regular cash contract, and with a well established publishing firm at that, but it would also mean they could dump all those dozens of Pheonix Sunday pages, clear the books as it were, and make some damn money off the stuff.

JUMBO COMICS became a showcase for all the early Pheonix production. Everything from weird-fantasy to westerns was represented. The art and the stories are fabulious and wonderful to read today. You can literally feel the creative excitment that went into all those characters. JUMBO COMICS, the early issues, was set up as a combination of one-sheets, a comic book of un-published Sunday newspaper strips bound together. Humor and historical adventure rubbed elbows with crime drama and science fiction. It was not untill issue #9 that JUMBO shrank down to the size of a regular comic book and dropped the Sunday strip reprint idea in favor of convential stories and layout.

But back in 1938 JUMBO COMICS #1 offered the reader a lot for his dime. It was an odd sort of book, oversized, 10½x14½", the publisher's idea; a bid to get better news stand display space. It was printed in black and white on colored paper, another odd thing. Once inside the reader was quickly engulfed in a multitude of features. He could ride the range with Wilton of the West, ship out on board a historic square masted fighting ship with Hawks of the Sea, laugh at the antics of Bobby and Pee Wee, or combine his humor with adventure in Bob Kane's Peter Pupp. The classics were represented with the Count of Monte Cristo and the Hunchback of Notre Dame. There were two detectives, Inspector Dayton and Spencer Steel, and even a spy, ZX-5. If the weird and fantastic were what he craved, he need only glance thru the Diary of Doctor Haywood. And, if he wasn't flipping the pages too fast, he could also encounter Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, all five pages of her, susposively written by "W. Morgan Thomas" and drawn by Mort Meskin.

Sheena was not the lead feature in JUMBO #1, in fact she was just barely mentioned on the cover at all. Yet when this comic introduced Sheena to the waiting American public, it made comic history. Sheena was the world's first, original, female comic book hero, and indeed, besides being first, she was also destined to become one of the most successful female characters ever seen in comics. More than any other creation, she shaped the future handling of female heroines to follow, and also drastically influenced the way in which comic books would view and would treat the theme of jungle adventure over the coming years.

Altho not the lead feature in JUMBO #1, at five pages she was the longest strip in the book. The other features were only four pages each, or less. The first eight issues of JUMBO were laid out as a collection of Sunday strip pages, one full page strip per page, each page complete with logo and all. Due to this Sunday strip style it took Sheena four issues to work her way thru that first adventure, all fourteen pages of it.

Our story opens deep in a remote part of Africa. "In search of the mysterious Sheena",

says the comic, "Bob Reynolds and Professor Van Dyke, become separated----Alone--Bob is attacked by Sheena's guards." Too weak to even lift his weapon, Bob, who is pictured here as your typical young dark-haired rugged outdoor type, is easily disarmed and captured. He is carried back to the village and made a prisoner. Two days later Professor Van Dyke is also captured. They talk in the prison hut about the beautiful jungle queen. Sheena as pictured in this first strip is tall, lean, sexy, with long blond hair and is wearing a two piece outfit of doe skin or some other soft leather material.

"How did she come here," asks Van Dyke, "and how did she become queen of these fierce natives?"
"I've been here two days and all I know is that she's young and beautiful," answers Bob,

"But I'm going to find out everything, right now."

The pair break out of the hut, knocking out their guard, and head for the huge cave where Sheena holds court. At the entrence they pause, stunned by the savage magnitude of the place, and fascinated by the strange speece of the natives. Van Dyke recognizes it as "an almost forgotten language, used in these parts years ago." Suddenly they are spotted, and the native warriers rush foreward to kill the intruders. By Van Dyke raises his hands in the universal gesture of friendship and speaks a word in their own language. They are so surprised at this that the group pulls up short. One over zealous guard who is determinded to slay Van Dyke with a bow and arrow is haulted by a sharp word of command from Sheena herself.

Bob and Van Dyke try to explain that they are friends, but the white strangers are beneath Sheena's royal notice. She refuses to speak with them, and turns them over to the witch doctor, who invites them to dinner and proceeds to explain the origins of the strange tribe.

It seems that a group of Gengus Khan's Mongol warriers split off from the main group and fought their way southward, enjoying the warm climit and the easy plunder. However, as they worked their way deeper into Africa, they found the going rougher, with wild beasts waiting to strike them down, deseases and fevers of every sort thinning out their ranks daily, and fierce tribesmen determined to defend every inch of their native soil. Their numbers depleted by more than half, they at last stumbled on this fertile valley, green and lush and cool, protected from the outside world. In a massive battle they managed to defeat the original inhabitants and settled down. Over the years they interbred with the natives and produced the unique hearty tribe over which Sheena rules.

"But what of Sheena?" asks Bob. Well, Bob and the rest of us had to wait until JUMBO #2 for the answer to that question. When the story reopens, the witch doctor takes up the narrative again, "Many moons ago...a white man, such as you, wandered into our land. With him he brought a little white girl with hair the color of corn... He was a very learned man and soon he and I became very friendly. He wrote much and studied our ancient relics. In return for my services he taught me your language. After he had written much in his books, he wished to leave...but I would not let him go. So I brewed a curse on him, and soon as a result of my magic, he died. To retain my power over my people, I made Sheena a goddess. She is cunning, and knows the great jungle, and though she is a woman, she is fearless in battle."

The pair are enthralled by the narrative. "So Sheena is the daughter of a white man," muses Van Dyke. "Her father must be Cardweel Rivington," says Bob. How this name should suddenly drop out of thin air is not covered.

The story suddenly takes an adventurous turn. A native warrier brings word that still more white men are approaching the village. Sheena is unsure whether they are friends or enemies, but she has a way of finding out. Summoning Bob, she sends him off to investigate and bring back word of the intentions of these other whites. If he fails to return, the life of Van Dyke will be forfit.

Unfortunately the new group of whites is led by Bat Morgan, who is convinced the valley of this strange tribe hides a hoard of gold. When Bob approaches, Morgan pretends to be a scientist on a peaceful exploring mission. But Bob is suspicious of the lack of scientific equipment and the large number of rifles and other weapons in evidence. Confronting Morgan, Bob is captured and offered a share in the golden boody if he will lead Morgan and his henchmen into the village. Bob refuses, and is tied up and placed under guard.

The guard cannot understand Bob's reluctance to throw in with the gang. "I know why won't throw in with Bat...you'd rather keep the gold yourself, eh?" "No!" replies Bob, thus setting the moral tone for the rest of the series, "I have no motive other than to allow those natives to keep their gold."

When Bob does not return by nightfall, Sheena decides to investigate. She arrives just in time to see the angry guard preparing to smash Bob with a rifle butt. She attacks but the guard whirls and knocks her down. Momentarily dazed, the guard prepares to kill

her, but Bob throws himself foreward and knocks him off balance. Quick as a flash Sheena throws a knife and the criminal's life ends in a single panel. "For a brief moment their eyes meet in wordless gratitude," says the comic.

But there's no time for that mushy stuff. Taking a machine gun, ammo and other weapons, the pair return to the village and prepare for Morgan's onslaught, which comes the next morning. Morgan's men meet the machine gun head on and do not fare well. They are prepared to circle around it, little realizing that in the trees wait Sheena's warriers, who leap down on them and slaughter their enemies without mercy. Sheena takes to the trails to aid her warriers leaving Bob and Van Dyke to man the machine gun position.

Bob is worried that Sheena, not understanding modern weapons, will get herself killed. "You stay here Van Dyke...I'm going to follow her. I love Sheena and I'm not going to risk losing her." And sure enough Sheena encounters Bat Morgan face to face. With a snarl Morgan prepares to kill the savage jungle girl when Bob breaks thru into the clearing. Morgan turns and fires, hitting Bob in the shoulder. The distraction gives Sheena time enough to bury her long knife deep in Morgan's back.

A panel or so later we find that Bob's arm has healed and he is preparing to leave the hidden valley, and going with Bob is Sheena. Van Dyke has decided to stay on with the witch doctor and study the many ancient relics of the area. The final panel of the fourteen page story shows the two young lovers walking off into the underbrush and the unknown future, happy together. Very romantic, but hardly practical.

It was an interesting and exciting origin story, but like so many others, seems to be riddled with plot inconsistencies which will never be explained. The witch doctor who killed Sheena's father, leaves the strip in the guise of a good guy, murder apparently not being considered a very serious offense in those days. He is prepared to surrender the girl he raised to the position of jungle goddess without a mummer of complaint, and for her part, Sheena is ready to give up the life of ruler and protector of her people for the unknown life offered by Bob Reynolds, a man whose language she does not even understand. No mention was ever made again of Cardweel Rivington, Sheena's father, or anything else about her past. In fact, if you just happened to miss this first critical episode, you were definitely out of luck so far as background information about Sheena was concerned. And for all his poise and self confidence, Bob leaves the story without the slightest plan or idea of what his destination is going to be.

There are a lot of other questions about Sheena which go unanswered beyond those posed by this patchword origin story. Sheena was a product of the Iger-Eisner studios, but we have yet to learn who the creator of the character actually was. Both Iger and Eisner were prolific idea men, both were adapt at writing, and both were comic artists, altho I think everyone will concede that Eisner was certainly a better overall artist than Iger.

In interviews, Eisner has claimed credit for writing and drawing Hawks of the sea, and for assisting on other strips, but to the best of my knowledge he has never claimed any creative credit for Sheena. There is no Eisner influence to be found in any of the Sheena

artwork on these early issues, altho it seems a likely bet that further down the line he did help to write and lay out some of the stories. Jerry Iger, on the other hand, has occassionally referred to Sheena as his creation, and it may be that he was the man responsible for dreaming up the world's first comic book jungle girl. Other possibilities exist, of course. Sheena could have been a mutual production of many minds, or an idea created by Meskin and rounded out by Iger and Eisner as writers. The chances of getting the straight story, forty-one years later, seem a bit remote. Suffice it to say that Jerry Iger, as senior partner of Universal Pheonix, retained control of the strip after both Meskin and Eisner left the company for other pursuits, and in fact Iger retained control even after Fiction House Comics folded in the mid fifties.

Other interesting questions also present themselves. In an interview for the 1976 Comic Book Price Guide, Will Eisner stated that Sheena was sold overseas in strip form and made her first appearance in print in a foreign publication called WAGS. However, no further information seems to be avaliable. I have never heard of WAGS, and I have also never come in contact with any other fan who has ever heard of WAGS either, altho one correspondent ventured the opinion that it might have been an Australian enterprise. Not only do we not know what country WAGS appeared in, we do not know the date Sheena appeared in WAGS, and in fact, we don't even know what kind of publication WAGS was. It may have been a newspaper, or a comic book, or a weekly half tabloid section, a boy's story paper, an advertising sheet, whatever it actually was, if anyone has any real information to offer on the subject they certainly seem to have gone out of their way to keep it to themselves. And of course, if Sheena first appeared in WAGS, did she also appear in other foreign publications beside that title before making her American debute? We have many questions, but no answers.

But perhaps the greatest question of all is why Iger or Eisner or Meskin or whoever created the strip, made it Sheena Queen of the Jungle. Why a jungle girl of all things? From a strictly commercial point of view, had the owners of Pheonix been really interested in selling strips to overseas papers, the ideal conception would have been an imitation Tarzan figure. Tarzan in the thirties was enjoying tremendous popularity, and was spawning imitators in the pulps and the movies by the dozens. Why not a jungle man, or a jungle boy even, instead of a jungle girl?

The common suspicion is that Sheena was inspired by some previous jungle woman of popular fiction. However you can check the pages of pulp literature back to and before the turn of the century, or thumb thru thousands of obscure lost race and science-fantasy books, and you will not find even one single jungle girl anywhere. Nowhere in the pages of fiction is there another creation which could have been drawn upon as a model for Sheena. So far as the world of imaginative fiction is concerned, Sheena is a genuine American original.

On the other hand, if the pages of popular fiction are void of role models, the realm of true life history provides us with something a little more interesting, and substantial. In 1927 Simon and Schuster published the first edition of a volume called TRADER HORN. The book is composed of the writings and reflections of Alfred Aloysius Horn, who was 73 year old at the time the book was published. The volume was organized and recorded by Ethelreda Lewis, a South African lady novelist of some fame, and recounts Horn's adventures as a youngster engaged as agent and trader for the firm of Hatton & Cookson, opening up the Ivory Coast and central Africa to European commerce. The book, told in simple, straight foreward language, is one of the most incredible and exciting adventure stories you will ever come across, a spirited and thrilling picture of African life in the 1870's, with triumpths and hardships related in graphic detail as the young man, eighteen years old, worked to open the rivers and plains of west Africa to European trade.

So popular was this fascinating book that within a year of its release it had gone thru multiple editions and sold over a hundred thousand copies. At that point Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bought the movie rights to the book and set about turning it into a major motion picture, a talkie at that. The movie itself was released in mid 1931, and spurred still greater reprint editions of the original novel, sending total circulation figures

"Trader Horn."

in all editions to almost half a million copies.

One of the key subplots of the book, which was developed as the central core plot of the movie, was Horn's experience after being inducted into the Isorga sect. This was a powerful religious and fraternal organization which exerted control from the Ivory coast up thru Ashanti and into the Congo, with a sphere of influence extending beyond even this enormous territory. The cult was brutal, blood thursty and barbaric in many of its activities. Horn was the first and only white man to be inducted into the cult, and he discovered that the living goddess of the sect was a beautiful young white girl about his own age (seventeen). She had been siezed by the native priests after her father, and English nobelman out to make his fortune in Africa, had died of the fever, and her mother had also died. She had been raised as a goddess, and held savage reign over this invisible empire which rulled by blood, and exacted tribute from almost every tribe in the area.

Horn made friends with the girl, whose name was Nina, and learned that she was a rather unwilling goddess. Eventually, with the help of his friend, he was ablé to help her escape from the cult in a tense and exciting series of events. Soon afterwards Nina married Horn's friend and sailed away with him to South America. In the book he described Nina as being one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen, with radiant auburn hair.

Maybe it was just a concession to the limitations of black and white photography, but when the movie came out in 1931, Nina's hair had changed from auburn to glowing blonde. The part of the devil goddess on the screne was played by Edwina Booth. MGM poured a considerable amount of money and energy into promoting the film, and the weekly sales figures reported in MOTION PICTURE HERALD showed it was a solid success with the public, altho the critics, all of them, gave it more pans than praise. Even if it was a bit corny at times, it was well received by the paying public and was shown and reshown in movie theaters around the country for several years.

I could be wrong, but I think that consciously or perhaps unconsciously, Iger, or Eisner, or Meskin, or whoever proposed the idea of Sheena, drew heavily on this film for inspiration. The similarities between the beautiful blonde goddess of the movie and Sheena are simply too obvious to ignore. Even the names are extremely similar, Nina and Sheena. In some of the movie scenes Nina's costume is also remiscent of the costumes Sheena wore in her first comic strip appearances. In addition the opening pages of the Sheena origin story corresponds very closely to the plot development of Nina the living devil goddess as seen in the movie. In my opinion the character in this movie was the role model used to create Sheena in the comics.

Whatever her exact origins, known or unknown, there seemed to be some doubt among the shop personnel as to whether or not she was really worth the effort. Sheena was never the main cover feature or even the lead strip in any of the oversized issues of JUMBO. In issue #4 her story space had been cut back from five pages to four, and she wasn't even mentioned with the list of other characters on the front cover. With issue #5 the strip was cut down even further, to three pages, hardly a vote of confidence from her creators.

However the future looked much brighter with issue #9, when JUMBO switched over and became a conventional comic book with regular feature length stories. Perhaps the backlog of Sunday strips had all been used up, or maybe W.W. Scott, the publisher over at Fiction House, simply decided that the experiment with an oversize black and white comic was not working.

Whatever the exact reason, the changeover was a stroke of luck for Sheena. She managed to grab off not only the lead slot of the new sized JUMBO, but she also copped the first cover as well, altho you had to have sharp eyesight to verify this fact. The cover showed a giant man-like monster menacing a frightened young man who bares only a superfic-

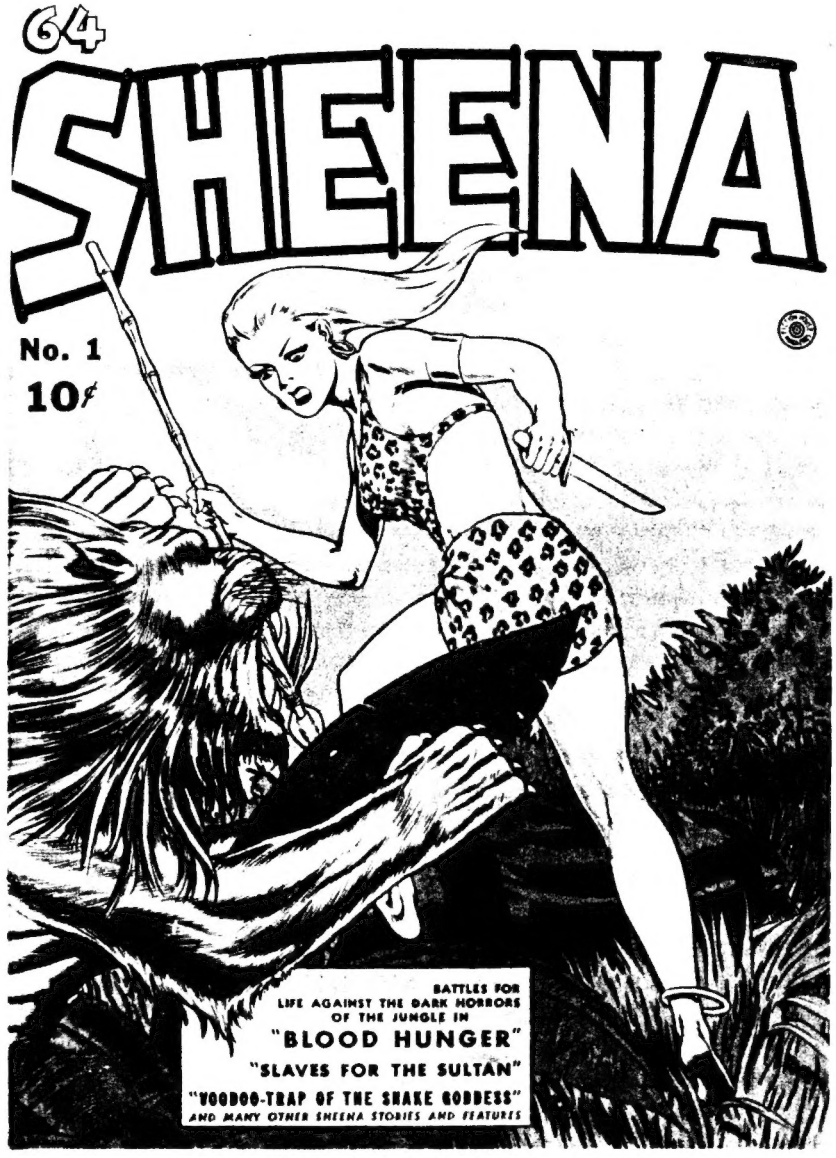
ial resemblence to Bob Reynolds. Delligent searching will reveal a mineateur figure of Sheena in the background, the extreme bottom left corner background to be exact, leaping from a tree with knife in hand, presumably coming to the rescue.

Inside, the story was now a comfortable page length, and the artwork was no longer by Meskin, nor does it show much of his influence. The linework appears to have been done by either Bob Powell or Lou Fine, or a combination of the two men. Altho the stories are still plot-line connected, each 11 or 13 page episode now forms a complete adventure. Curiously enough, the other JUMBO characters were still running serial type installments, even with the new standard format and full added color.

As Sheena stepped out of the pages of this issue, she was an almost completely developed character. Her background, moral outlook, locale, even her friends and story style are firmly established and clearly presented in this episode. By the time issue #10 rolled off the presses, Sheena's evolution was basically complete. The next fifteen years would see almost no changes or developments in the story line or the personality of the hero at all.

JUMBO #10 was the issue that adopted her new costume, the one which would immediately become a trademark with her appearances. Earlier stories had seen her wearing a wide assortment of outfits, most of them endless variations on the basic one piece strapless dress theme. During the oversized issues of the strip, virtually every separate page issues of the strip, virtually every separate page showed her wearing a different style of costume, giving rise to the suspicion that the original Sheena pages were actually drawn and completed over a period of many weeks, or even months, much in the manner of a regular established Sunday comic strip.

However by JUMBO #10 Sheena was ready to graduate up to the big time, in more ways than one, and she needed a distinctive and personalized costume. The writers and artists at Pheonix saw that she got one. Sheena had already experienced a couple of close encounters with wild animals in the past, notably a brief meeting with a black panther back in issue #6. But this story sees her slugging it out with a full grown killer lion, a rogue who has been attacking the local natives. This epic feline-to-female duel was depicted in sharp, full color detail that spared nothing when it came to dynamic graphics. The lion went into the battle armed with long razor sharp claws, powerful teeth, four hundred pounds of tempered muscle, and a lifetime of savage jungle experience. Sheena was armed with a steel bladed hunting



knife and a burning desire to make a success of it in the comic book business. The lion never even had a chance.

Having disposed of the lion in three and a half pages of detailed action, we find that another predititor, Leeta the leopard, has watched all this excitment, and has decided that Sheena is just the right size for a tasty mid day morsal. Leeda leaps down from a tree branch the minute Sheena's guard is down. Luckily for Sheena and the readers, Bob is handy and shoots the beast dead, right in mid-spring, no mean feat when you think about it. Of course, a few of you may be asking where the hell Bob and his trusty rifle were when Sheena was fighting for her life against that stupid lion. Such questions display a disappointing degree of adult-level cynicism and will be distainfully ignored by all right-thinking comic enthusiasts.

Sheena is delighted with Bob's kill and promptly decides to use the skin to make herself a new costume. One panel later the new costume is complete. (Things move rapidly in a Sheena story. She asks Bob for his opinion of the new outfit, and Bob responds like the typical lout we all suspected he was, saying, "it just prives that though you're a fierce fighter and have the courage of ten men, you're still a woman! Ha! Ha!" Male chevenism strikes again, even in the heart of the jungle.

Well, no matter. In her new costume Sheena was a sight designed to make grown men drool with lust and teen age girls green with envy. The costume was definitely on the skimpy side, comprised of full panties, nice and tight, with straps that flowed up over full ripe breasts, making only a courtest attempt at covering them, then went down the back in a sort of suspender effect. Sometimes the two straps across the front were shown joined in the center to provide a fuller covering for the breasts, sometimes not. It depended on who was handling the art that day. In addition to that, she added large golden hoop ear rings, wide gold bands on her upper arms, and thin rounded gold bangles at wrists and ankles. Those wrist and ankle bangles were very large and always looked as tho they would fall off as she walked along, but they never did. The logic of wearing ear rings, especially those enormous things Sheena sported, in a forest envournment full of branches and bushes to snag and pull also didn't seem very realistic, but logic very seldom plays a part in the development of a comic character's wearing apperal.

This was the basic costume that remained with her thru most of Sheena's turbulent career. Obviously it was designed with an eye more toward blatent sex appeal than toward envournmental functionality. Later on in the early fifties, in a sort of triffling concession to the theory of good taste, the costume was changed into a one piece bathing suit affair that covered all her torso. However it didn't make too much difference then either, since the clothing was cleverly drawn in such a way that everything worth considering from a sexual viewpoint was simply accentuated by the soft spotted fur covering.

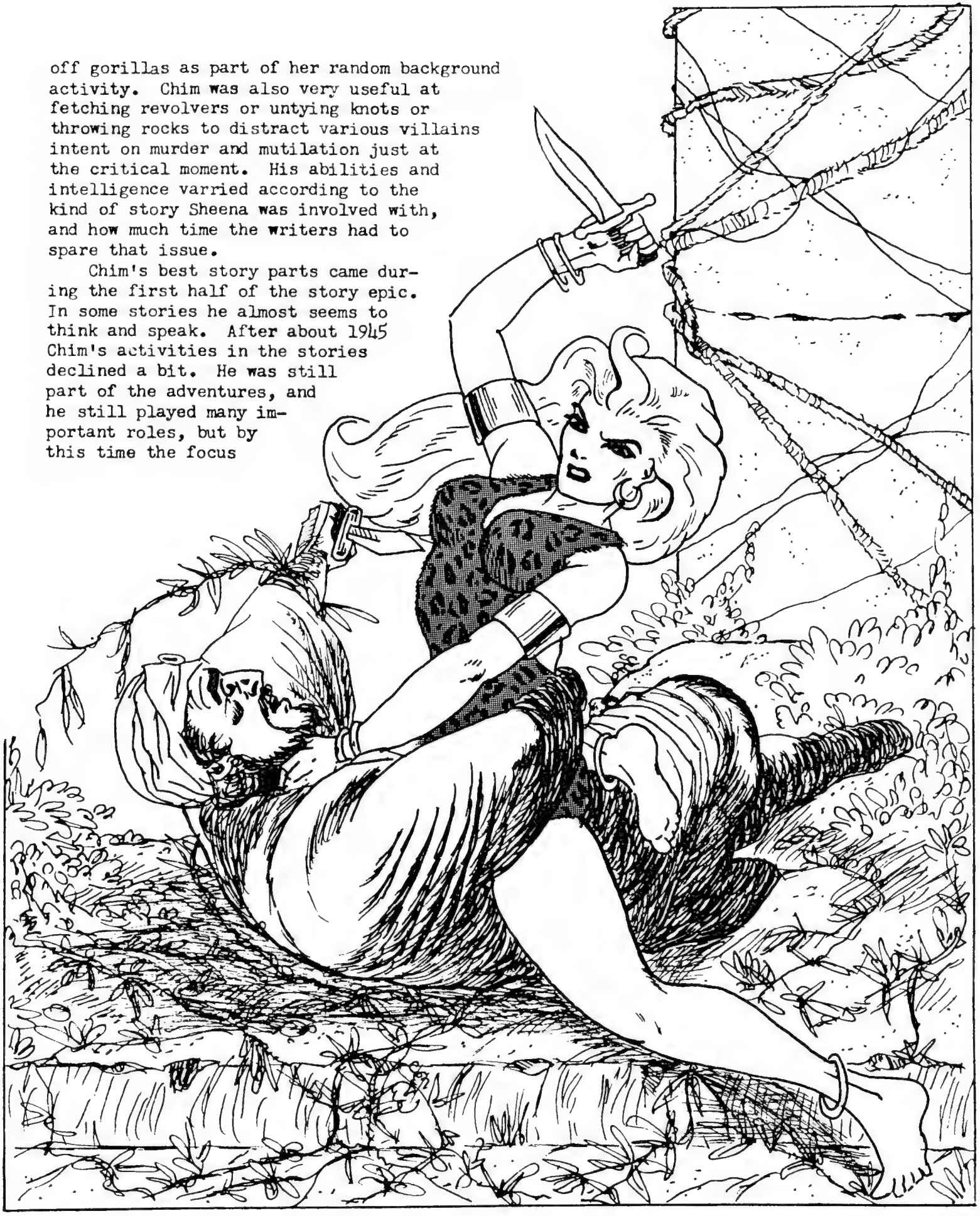
Sheena went thru her adventures with an absolute minimum of background personnel. Namely, she had her mate Bob, Chim the pet monkey, and herself. And that was all. Ocassionally specific natives or various white men would wander in and out of the stories describing themselves as old friends or companions from some past unnamed episode, but these people never stayed around long enough to make an impression, usually no longer than a single story as a matter of fact.

Chim the monkey was introduced back in the oversize JUMBO days, but he didn't come into his own or develop a definite personality until the book shrank down to regular comic size. He was obviously a direct swipe from the Tarzan movies of the day, and altho he played his share of light weight comedy parts, any reader could plainly see he had as many brains as the two human heroes.

Chim was an intrigral part of a good many stories, and made himself useful performing such chores as carrying messages between the two human heroes, or racing to the colonial authorities to muster outside assistance. In JUMBO #16 he even made friends with a black mained lion and together the pair managed to rescue the humans who were about to be sacrificed by an evil sorceress. In another story he called on his simian friends, the other monkeys and the great apes, and had them attack in mass formation to save Sheena from brutal torture. This was done even tho Sheena had already developed the habit of killing

off gorillas as part of her random background activity. Chim was also very useful at fetching revolvers or untying knots or throwing rocks to distract various villains intent on murder and mutilation just at the critical moment. His abilities and intelligence varried according to the kind of story Sheena was involved with, and how much time the writers had to spare that issue.

Chim's best story parts came during the first half of the story epic. In some stories he almost seems to think and speak. After about 1945 Chim's activities in the stories declined a bit. He was still part of the adventures, and he still played many important roles, but by this time the focus



of the action was so solidly on Sheena and the extrodinary menaces she faced, that there was very little of the lime-light left over, especially for a pet monkey.

The other major continueing character thruout the stories was Sheena's mate, Bob Reynolds. Altho Sheena had earned the title Queen of the Jungle, it was obvious right from the start that Bob was definitely not the King of the Jungle. Maybe crown prince, or queen's consort would be the more approperiate term. In earlier stories up until about 1946 or so, Bob played a confident and active part. He got into and out of trouble with the same ease that Sheena did, and the pair played their roles thruout the adventures pretty much as equal partners, each sharing the hardships and the triumpths together.

However, after 1946 the stories took a change in emphasis. Sheena developed into the real star of the show, while Bob faded slightly into the background. He still played strong parts in every single story, but it was now obvious that while he was skillful and adapt enough, for a white man, he was no match for Sheena. Sheena became smarter, more powerful, a better fighter, more knowledgable in the ways of the jungle, and was now quite obviously the leader of the team rather than an equal partner as in the past. Sheena's developing abilities in all areas made book look a bit less than competent. Indeed, some of the villains even referred to Bob contemptiously as "Sheena's weakling mate", a criticism that may perhaps have been a little harsh.

Bob was one of the most even tempered and loyall characters you could ever hope to meet, either in the comics or out. Fierce in battle, his fighting strength was matched only by his good natured respect and admiration for his fellow man. Bob was always the one willing to give the other characters in the stories, even potential villains, the benefit of the doubt. He seldom lost his temper, and never with his friends. His loyality in the face of incredible odds is astonishing to see. In many stories where it appears Sheena has been killed, Bob continues risking his life to save his African friends even against overwhelming odds, and no plea for help, either from human or defenseless animal was considered too unimportant for him to answer. If we had people

like Bob running the governments of the world, warfare and human misery would long since have been obliterated on this planet.

We are never exactly sure where Bob came from or what his background is. In the earlier stories we assume that Bob is American. In JUMBO #18 he meets an old flame, Sybil Dunton, and they talk about the good old days at the Rugby matches and their trips to Vennia, and we get the definite impression that Bob is British. Sheena was intensely jealous of Sybil, and she is heart broken when Sybil and Bob exchange an innocent kiss for old time's sake. Still later on the stories took to referring to Bob as "a fellow American", and the impression that he was an American more or less remained up until the end of the series.

The romance between Bob and Sheena was a love match made in heaven and tested in hell. It is doubtful that any other comic book lovers ever went thru so much for each other during their careers. Sheena and Bob risked their lives so often for one another when the situation was virtually hopeless that you'd need a lengthy score card to keep track of the events. No lukewarm drawing room affiar, their romance was tested in the hot fires of blazing adventure, and had to endure against overwhelming odds.

The star of the strip was Sheena herself. She was billed as Queen of the Jungle, and she lived up to that title, in every respect. The jungle was a hard, ruthless envournment, and in order to survive she had to get tough, or die. She got tough, quickly. In addition to the normal perils of living in the heart of an untamed wilderness, Sheena had to contend with the pepetual flow of extrodinary, not to say, even bizzare, problem situations the writers kep inventing to test her abilities. Those soft sexy curves concealed muscles of steel and a keen intellect. Both qualities were put to the test in every single story.

Sheena's primary weapons in the day-to-day battle for survival were the bot and arrow, and a good stout hunting knife. She was also adapt in the use of the long spear, but she relied on the other two weapons most of the time. For some reason she seldom used any kind of firearm. She could handle a rifle, if forced to, but she preferred the more primitive weapons at hand.

Her skill with the bow and arrow was remarkable. She could bring down game with arrows as easily as Bob could with his heavy hunting rifle. Altho she was seldom shown carrying a bow, it saw good use in many stories. Despite her obvious ability with this long range weapon, it was her prowness with the knife that really stood out in the reader's mind. She was an expert with that thing. She could throw it with deadly accuracy over amazing distances, and in hand to hand combat her skill literally had to be seen to be believed.

In fact, sometimes you couldn't believe it, even when you saw it, no matter how hard you tried. One of the more incredible sights in comics took place almost every single Sheena story past 1941, as our jungle heroine, trusty blade in hand, was propelled into action against a wide variety of animal menaces which she fought off in stirring hand to hand combat. You could almost bet your pay check on it. Somewhere, usually right up at the beginning of the story, our gal Sheena was going to be confronted by some raging jungle monster and would be forced to defend her life armed only with raw courage and a sharp hunting knife.

Sheena responded to these challenges with predictable efficiency. She leaped into the fray with eyes blazing and a sort of joyful abandon. She was able to dispose of even the most hideous and dangerous beastal menace in rapid order, usually no more than five or six panels at best, and by the most amazing of coincidences, she always managed to leave her animal opponent a torn and bloody corpse, while she never received so much as a single cut or scratch thruout the entire battle. Think about that for a minute or two. History has recorded the names of thousands of well armed hunters and explorers who were killed by maurading animals in the heart of Africa, yet Sheena, a plucky young lass with a nine inch hunting knife, is able to fight off at least one blood-thurst brute every single story thruout the bulk of her existence, and she does it every time without receiving so much as a bruise or blemish to show for the effort.

And very often it gets even more involved than that. Sometimes she has to fight it

out with not merely one, but sometimes two or three raging animals in the same story. She seemed to be in love with the idea of hand to hand battle, or at least her primary writers, Ruth Roche and Jerry Iger were in love with the idea. It was considered a positive breech of jungle etiquette if Sheena didn't strangle a snake or butch a lion or otherwise carve up some primeval preditor in vicious mortal combat at least once or twice every single story. Even such normally peaceful creatures a hippos, who want nothing more out of life than to munch on river grass and bask in the warm tropical sun, were cast as villaneous ill temepered monsters whenever Sheena was around.

Edgar Rice Burroughs, creator of the original jungle hero of fiction, was also the man who invented the idea of man-to-beast combat. However, in his Tarzan stories he was very careful to make certain that the reader understood how dangerous the situation was. Tarzan's battles with lions and giant bull apes were described in long gory detail, and when Tarzan managed to win out, Burroughs made sure that everyone understood that it was a supreme triumpth of human strength and skill over nature in its most deadly form. Tarzan also never escaped these encounters scott free. He dragged himself off the fallen bodies of his animal opponents bleeding and bruised and damn lucky to still be all in one piece.

It's obvious that Sheena's epic battles drew nothing from real life. Jungle animals in the wild are extremely dangerous if provoked. To cite an example from Horn's book, he related how he and a group of native hunters were after a black leopard that was killing cattle in the area. They followed the beast to a clump of trees. As the hunters approached, the leopard leaped out of the tree, clawed up five of the native warriers, killing two of them on the spot, and was back into the tree and moving off thru the branches before anyone even had a change to raise a rifle and take a single shot. Yet we are asked to believe that Sheena is able to destroy black leopards and other animals even larger and more dangerous in hand to hand combat without sustaining so much as a single scratch.

Sheena's battles, related with careless regularity, obviously gained their inspiration from the Johnny Weismuller movies, those popular comedy parodies of the Tarzan stories in which Weismuller defeats a lion or a crocodile every single picture, and seems to do it in a comical fit of clumpsiness.

Oh well, if you could ignore the monthly wholesale slaughter of our four footed friends in virtually every single story, the other pictures of African backgrounds and African life in the Sheena adventures is remarkably honest and straight foreward. The Iger-Roche outlook toward the African tribesman was one relatively unmarred by racial overtones. The natives are inevitably pictured as alert, intelligent, strong and extremely courageous. The primary concession to American sterotyping was in the idea that many of the natives were extremely superstitious, a value judgement which may not have been too far off the mark. As late as 1966, during the civil wars in central Africa, revoluntary forces in the Congo were able to stop advancing government forces by bribing local witch doctors to place black magic charms on all the major highway bridges. The government soldiers were so terrified of these fetishes that they refused to cross over any of the bridges untill the magic spells could be mullifed. And this was only a short twelve years ago.

It is an unfortunate fact that the colonial powers who ruled most of black Africa made only minimal efforts at educating and training the peoples under their control. They

built a few large trading cities, developed sea ports, built medical aid stations everywhere, and did a fairly good job of maintaining peace and order. But that was about all. When the Belgiums pulled out of the Congo in 1960 there were fewer than two hundred trained black African doctors, government administrators and educators in the entire region, a shocking indictment on the quality of Belgium colonial rule, and a situation shared in large part by all the other colonial powers as well.

The primary purpose of colonial rule was, of course, to develop trade. Trade routes opened up during the 1970's and onwards saw a sudden influx of European made goods thruout the continent, primarily firearms. Steel knives, metal farm tools, and liquer were close behind in popularity, none of which you will find in any Sheena story. The natives in real life Africa were quick to realize the great advantages rifles offered over bows or spears. So quickly did gunpowder replace conventional weapons, that the British war against the Ashanti empire in the 1880's was fought entirely with firearms on both sides, and by the late 1890's rifles and pistols has replaced spears and bows for everything except ceromonial use.

Unfortunately all this information seems to have escaped the writers over at Universal Pheonix. You may look long and hard thru hundreds of Sheena stories, but you will never find a scene where a local native uses modern weapons. Ocassional Negroes, villains mind you, might be seen using a pistol or a rifle in their attempt to plunder and kill, but the

local inhabitants were armed only with the weapons of popular tradition; bows, knives, long spears and clubs. White men carried fire arms, and used them with devestating results, yet according to the Sheena stories, no black African ever expressed even the slightest interest in owning one of the "boom sticks" for himself.

Sheena spent most of her time trying to make a daily living, and in defending her various peoples against outside exploitation and internal warfare. The stories wasted no time in showing that nine out of ten white men who came into the jungle were up to no good. Most of them were renegades; murderers, thieves, con men with schemes to swindle the natives out of their hard earned trade goods, be they tobacco, ivory, gold or furs. And if they weren't planning to rip off native commerce, then they were intent on plundering sacred temples, or cheating the people out of their tribal lands and mineral wealth. In their greedy lust for instant illicet wealth, these white monsters made no bones about killing anyone who stood in their way, and they often manipulated, or even manufactured brutal superstitions to bewilder the natives and force them to dotheir dirty work.

Most of the white willains are easy to spot early on in the game. They were pictured as disshoveled and unkept in appearance, many of them had a few days growth of beard to mark their slovely habits. They smoked foul dangling cigarettes and were either fat and bloated or lean and sinister looking. The female villains were invariably dark haired and beautiful, in a cold, sadistic way. Female villains delighted in torturing and mutulating their opponents at every oppertunity, and most expressed a sincere interest in carving Sheena and Bob into small bloody pieces while their native friends were forced to watch.

Sheena had her hands full protecting her people from this sort of ruthless outside interference. Her other primary opposition came from charleton witch doctors, or powerman local jungle tyrants intent on breaking the peace or murdering their neighbors for purly selfish personal reasons.

Every Sheena story was a carefully written morality play that clearly depicted the elements of green and crime. After an approperiate number of pages of fast moving action, they also showed the inevitable end of such unhealthy pursuits. Sheena and Bob are pictured as the forces of justice, living monuments to moral stability, not only working for peace and harmony, but firm in their dedication that the local natives should not, and would not, be harrassed or forced to change their traditions just to please the greedy aims of outsiders. It is difficult to recall many other comic book series that were so steadfast in their moral values.

It is also difficult to find many other comic characters that enjoyed such a tremendous variety of detail and story plotting. Sterotyped story writing, except for the manditory knife fight with the local animal menace each and every story, was simply not part of the Sheena mystique. Originality was a Sheena trade mark, and about the only criticism you could level was that there was certainly a lot of trouble in Sheena's little corner of the jungle.

The stories were contributed mostly by such people as Jerry Iger, Ruth Roche, Al Feldstein, and Manning Lee Stokes, all of whom were prolific writers. Probably Ruth Roche was Sheena's most consistent and long lasting writer. She joined Pheonix in 1940, and soon became such a valuable asset that she was made a full partner in the enterprise. She was an enormously productive writer and could hammer out a story about almost any subject on the spur of the moment, including a good many Sheena episodes.

The tone for the Sheena stories on the art front was clearly established while Will Eisner was still part of the firm. It would be unfair to say that Eisner's own style of art was the dominent influence in the operation, but Eisner's concepts of what constituted good artwork did become the model. This basically boiled down to a sharp emphasis on good clear line work, with the scene focusing on the human or central figures in the story. Background was considered important, and was always to be rendered up in clear detail, but it was definitely background, well back, and was used to support, not surround the central figures in each panel. Background became part of each panel only if it was needed to make the human figures and their actions move, or added to the immediate story line. If not, it was deliberately kept as simple as was convenient.

Thus, in the typical Sheena story, we do not see the overgrown and often confusing jungle backdrops adopted for most Tarzan or other jungle stories. Instead we are treated to a few simple trees, rolling plains, simple villages. The fact that this background is a much truer representation of real life Africa, rather than the maze of jungle vines and bushes so many Tarzan artists feel compelled to insert, is just a lucky coincidence; it wasn't planed that way. Any art produced by Pheonix either while Eisner was part of the firm, or afterwards, features this same spartian background effect. After Eisner left Pheonix to pursue his own interests, Jerry Iger went to great lengths to make certain that this particular style of art was continued with all his comic book projects.

The figures in Pheonix strips are usually shown as tho they are standing about six to ten feet back inside a frame produced by the panel wall, rather than have them jammed and squeezed up in close proximity such as is the popular style today. The figures are shown in this sliding foreground, but never too close to the reader. Even so-called close up shots are simply not that closeup. As a result of this careful use of prospective, all the figures and all the backgrounds blend carefully and create a very comfortable, satisfying effect with nothing to detract from the rapid flow of the story.

The specific art style Sheena settled on might be called a sort of special blend, again primarily an Eisner created combination which was continued after Eisner left. This might be best visualized as a combination of the styles of Eisner, Bob Powell and Lou Fine, all together. While Eisner apparently only handled Sheena on the covers of a few JUMBO issues, under his direction the finished product was a combination of firm outlines, fine detail when needed, but always featuring lines with good depth and careful attention to human figure art.

Bob Powell became Sheena's artist after JUMBO became a regular sized comic book, and remained the primary artist for many years to come, stamping his own influence permanently into the character. After 1945 or so the artwork changed somewhat, drifting slightly away from the Powell look, into heavier lines, a sort of Matt Baker-Ann Brewster feeling. It is difficult if not downright impossible to tell who is doing what art on the Sheena strip, or almost any other Pheonix creation during this period because of the way the artwork was developed. Iger liked to hand out stories to a penciller, sometimes to several pencillers and then when the pencil work came back, the pages were inked by his on-premisess art staff, with different people handling faces, or bodies, or trees, or machinery, or whaever each inking artist seemed most comfortable doing. A single story might show the work of a dozen different artists working on it. Since the inking staff, and the pencilling artists as well, changed rather rapidly thru the years, individual efforts are really impossible to track down.

Still, as a very general value judgement, you could say that the Powell-Fine style dominated the earlier stories, the Powell-Baker-Brewster look dominated the stories up thru the late forties, and that after 1950 the art went downhill a bit, as a lot of new people tried to maintain the style sheets and the quality standards Iger had religiously insisted on in past years. The turnover in shop personnel increased during the early fifties due to the incredible boom in comic book production. Most good artists, even half trained artists, found little trouble getting free lance work with many of the small

companies springing up everywhere, and at times Universal Pheonix had difficulty maintaining even a minimum staff.

Sheena was undoubtedly the most popular female character the comics field has ever seen, and one of the most popular comics creation of all time. She was Fiction House's most successful comic offering, and Universal Pheonix's most valuable property. It is difficult to comprehend at this point in time just how solid a hold she had on the hearts and the imaginations of the comic buying public during the late forties and early fifties. The page reprinted over there is just one example of the enormous grass roots popularity she experienced.

JUMBO COMICS was her primary stomping grounds, but it wasn't long before she was striking out with a book of her own. SHEENA COMICS #1 appeared in the spring of 1942. Two more issues appeared dated 1942, then the comic was unexpectedly dropped. The failure to continue the series was probably based not on any lack of sales, but more likely because Fiction House simply didn't qualify for an additional war-time paper allotment, and without the paper it was impossible to print and distribute a new magazine title.

However, in 1948, near the heigth of her popularity, Sheena made a triumphant return in her very own comic book. Issue #4 continued the old number system and was dated Fall. Issue #4 appeared with a cover illo swiped from the cover of JUMBO #20. The Pheonix art staff was pretty good at recycling impressive illustrations, both inside and out. A beautiful bi-plane rescue scene recorded in JUMBO #19 was later reused in SHEENA #1. The story line was different, but the art on those panels was a direct line for line tracing. Examples of art swipes from other strips were common as well. After the relaunch in 1948, Sheena enjoyed fifteen additional issues and finally closed out with issue #18.

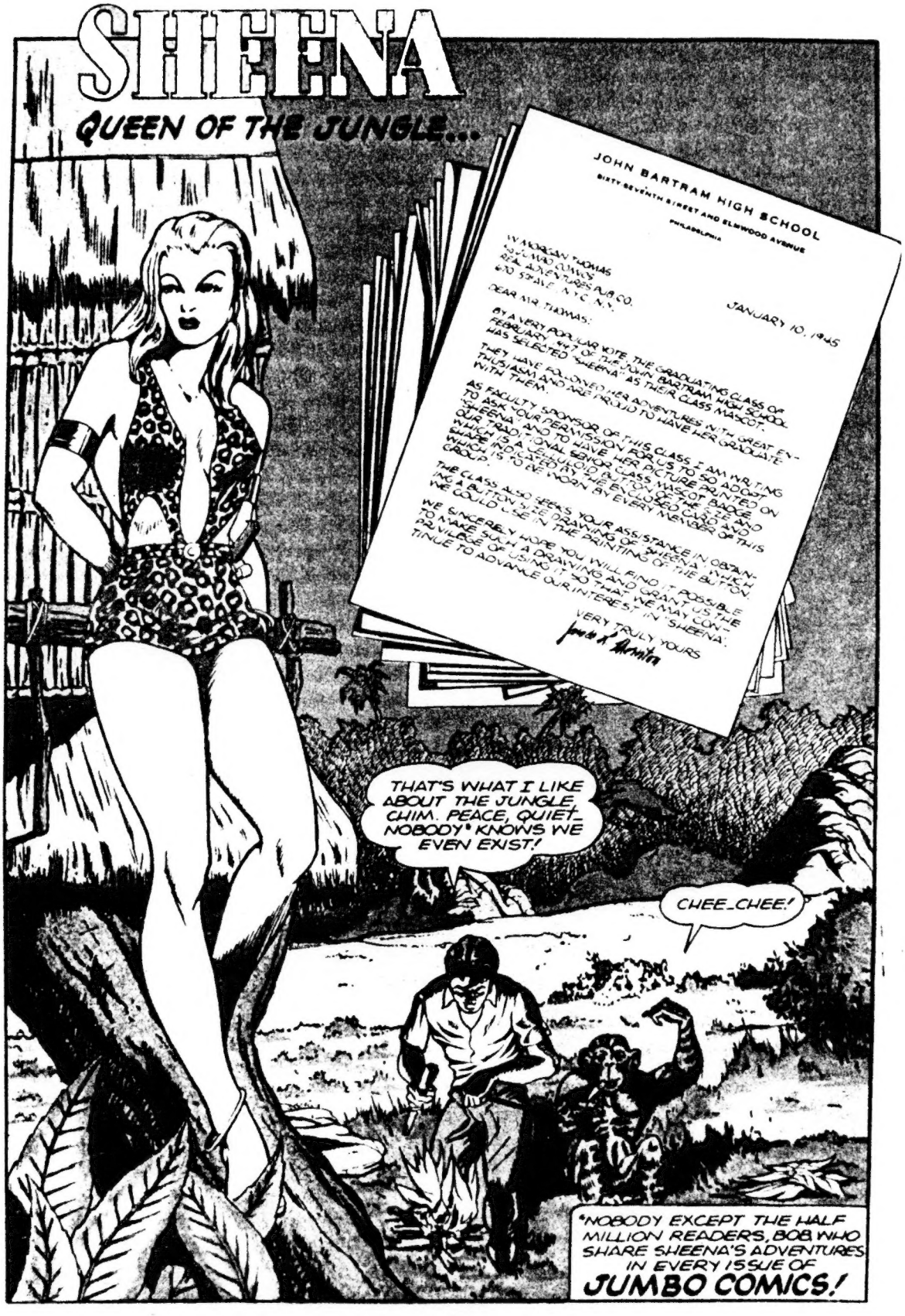
The enormous popularity of the character and her influence on readers both juvenile and adult can best be shown by noting that during the late forties a considerable number of Sheena imitators began to show up on the stands. Traditional super heroes were dumped by the dozens as jungle girls and jungle men sprang up to take their places. The lengthy parade included such characters as Princess Pantha, Tigra, Judy of the Jungle, Kara Jungle Princess, Nyoka, Rulah Jungle Princess, Tiger Girl, Marga Panther Woman, Jan of the Jungle Saari Jungle Goddess, Tanda White Princess of the Jungle, Zegra Jungle Emperess, Leopard Girl, Camilla of the Jungle, and Lorna of the Jungle, just to name a few.

Ironically, some of these Sheena imitators were created by the Iger-Roche studios themselves, imitating their own premier creation for other publishing houses. Universal-Pheonix even tried their hand at the direct comic publishing business themselves in the mid forties, and in 1946 one of their new titles was SEVEN SEAS COMICS. And guess what folks, the lead feature was South Sea Girl, drawn by Matt Baker, a Sheena imitator produced by the owners and creators of Sheena as competition for their own best selling property. An interesting back up feature in SEVEN SEAS was Captain Cutless, an imitation of that other popular JUMBO COMICS strip, Sea Hawk.

SEVEN SEAS COMICS only lasted six issues. Most of the carbon-copy imitations of Sheena also did not enjoy very long runs. The most enduring of the Sheena look-alikes were the ones created by Universal-Pheonix for Fiction House, meant to be companions to Sheena, as it were. Tiger Girl dominated FIGHT COMICS until it folded, Camilla back up JUNGLE COMICS and a few odd balls also floated around from time to time. Sheena imitators sold their share of comics, but all in all nothing could quite match the magic combination of art and writing that made Sheena unique.

There were Sheena fan clubs. There was even a feeble attempt at Sheena toy merchandising. When TV became a popular national craze, the new medium turned to the comics for inspiration. Superman, the world's most popular comic character was the natural first choise to make the transition from pulp paper to the video tube, and it seemed only fitting that Sheena, the most popular female character the comics had ever presented should be the second comic hero to make the airwaves.

Production on the Sheena TV series unfortunately did not match that of Superman. As a youngster I vividly remeber watching a couple of the Sheena episodes and wondering why the TV series was so crummy when the comic stories were so good. I was too young then to


SHEENA
QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE...
JOHN BARTRAM HIGH SCHOOL
SIXTY-SEVENTH STREET AND ELMWOOD AVENUE
PHILADELPHIA
JANUARY 10, 1945
DEAR MR. THOMAS:
AS FACULTY SPONSOR OF THIS CLASS, I AM WRITING TO ASK YOUR PERMISSION FOR US TO SO ADOPT SHEENA AND TO HAVE HER PICTURE PAINTED ON OUR TRADITIONAL SENIOR CLASS MASCOT BADGE WHICH IS A CHERISHED PART OF THE SENIOR CLASS AND WHICH IS CELEBRATED BY ELABORATE CLASS AND GROUP.
THE CLASS ALSO SEEKS YOUR ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING A BUTTON WITH THE DRAWING OF SHEENA, WHICH WE COULD USE IN THE PRINTING OF THE BUTTON.
WE SINCERELY HOPE YOU WILL FIND IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE SUCH A DRAWING AND GRANT US THE PRIVILEGE OF USING IT SO THAT WE MAY CONTINUE TO ADVANCE OUR INTEREST IN SHEENA.
VERY TRULY YOURS
THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THE JUNGLE, CHIM. PEACE, QUIET— NOBODY* KNOWS WE EVEN EXIST!
CHEE-CHEE!
*NOBODY EXCEPT THE HALF MILLION READERS, BOB, WHO SHARE SHEENA'S ADVENTURES IN EVERY ISSUE OF JUMBO COMICS!

understand the enormous problems involved in producing sweeping jungle action stories with a tightly limited budget, on back studio lots with actors not far removed from amateur status.

Still, the TV series served to heighten the sales of the comic books For a long time Jerry Iger also tried to merchandise Sheena as a daily comic strip. I don't think he had much success with the idea, but some of the proof sheets are still around, and even at this late date, he still has stacks of production and promo sheets advertising the idea. Sheena was doi ,g so well that Fiction House even introduced a pulp magazine based on her exploits in 1952. Unfortunately it did not fare well at all, and lasted only a single issue.

Sheena was riding high. She was the prime sales factor for the Fiction House comics group, her readers loved her, she was on TV, she was on top of the world. That's why it came as such a shock when she dropped dead in 1953.

It was an unfortunate thing. Fiction House had been primarily a pulp magazine enterprise. But by the end of the forties the pulps were in deep trouble. By the early fifties they were dying. Production costs were up, and competition from other entertainment forms, particularly the comics and television, were cutting heavily into the resevoir of potential pulp buyers.

Altho Fiction House introduced many new pulp titles during the early fifties, particularly westerns, the odds were against them. For awhile some of their new magazines enjoyed limited success, but many others lost money heavily, and none of them, not even their snappiest westerns, had any sustaining power.

At the same time, the comics field was booming. Competition was tough, much tougher than it had been just a few years earlier. Literally hundreds of new comic titles were being added to the stands every sin-

gle year. New companies were springing up everywhere, and distribution was becoming more and more difficult to maintain. With an explosion of new titles for readers to choose from, Fiction House found their circulation base being steadily undercut.

Furthermore Fiction House had split their comic efforts into two parts during the mid-forties. In an effort to squeeze more profit out of the business, roughly one half of their titles, eventually including such books as PLANET, JUNGLE, WINGS and FIGHT, had been taken out of the hands of Universal-Pheonix and were being run directly out of the editorial offices. Free-lance artists were hired to illustrate scripts created by the Fiction House editors or their staff of pulp-story writers, much in the same way comics are produced today. Since the artists used were often graduates from the Iger-Roche operation, the illustrations for these in-house produced comics are largely indistinguishable from the features being turned out by Universal-Pheonix. Except, of course, that the free-lance artists got to sign their names to their work.

Unfortunately the popularity of many of the in-house comics seemed to be inconsistent. At first simply economic rhemedies were applied to regain some of the profits sacrificed to rising costs and fragmenting sales. The page count on most books was cut from 52 to 36. JUMBO COMICS was not affected by that move. Some titles, notably FIGHT COMICS in 1950, were folded outright. Then other comics changed publishing schedules, dropping back first to bi-monthly, then eventually to quarterly. JUMBO COMICS was not affected by that move either.

Apparently these changes provided some relief for the problems, because what happened next was a boom in the Fiction House comic business. Suddenly a whole hoard of new titles burt forth on the stands. Titles such as COWGIRL ROMANCES, KAANGA, LONG BOW, APACHE, JET ACES, GHOST, MONSTERS, WAMBI, FIREHAIR, INDANS and the like were created, many of them made up partially or entirely of reprints from Fiction House's past comic offerings. Some of these new titles were under the control of the in-house editorial staff, some of them were farmed out to Universal-Pheonix.

An average of twelve Fiction House comics of one kind or another was always on the stands every single month of the year thru most of 1951 and 1952. The aim seems to have been to saturate the stands with enough titles to keep the Fiction House image and art style in the comic buyer's eye. By concentrating on the popular trends of the day, primarily westerns, some measure of financial success seems to have been achieved by all of this, and for a few more years things went smoothly.

But unfortunately this experiment, like the one with the pulp magazines, did not work out in the long run. Profits made from the better selling titles were poured back to help other books that were struggling along or just barely breaking even. In the end none of them were able to survive.

Other factors may have compounded things. Comic books of all kinds were coming under increasing attack from educators and public committees, particularly the horror and crime comics. With Fiction House's well known emphasis on lightly clad sexy girls, they could have experienced some distribution problems. Printing costs took a sharp junp during the Korean War, and this certainly could not have helped Fiction House's profit picture any. Jerry Iger may even have decided that he needed more money to produce Sheena and the other features that were still the backbone of the Fiction House books. These are questions for which we have no clear answers.

In early 1953 Fiction House began to close down it's operation. Pulp titles were killed off in droves, and so were the comics. A few titles were retained. Considering the choices PLANET STORIES, PLANET COMICS, JUNGLE COMICS, WINGS, for example, this last effort must have been a labor of love rather than a decision based on clear business logic. PLANET COMICS, WINGS and JUNGLE all saw their final issues in early 1954. Reprints had clogged many of their pages before the final blow fell. PLANET STORIES, the pulp, managed to struggle along until 1955, when it too folded, and then Fiction House was really and truly out of the popular publishing business once and for all.

As for Sheena, the end came quietly in 1953. It seems fair to assume that Sheena's popularity was still strong right up until the very end. Of course, she lost her own book

in Winter 1952-53 with issue #18. JUMBO COMICS had it's page count cut back from 52 to 36 with issue #150, but still, Sheena was being called on during this difficult period to provide not only the cover and the lead story, but also a second back-up adventure as well. The editors, at least, had confidence in her pulling power. And JUMBO was still a monthly comic book, the only monthly Fiction House had left.

But a few issues later Sheena received a real slap in the face from her former benefactors. In a last minute effort to capitalize on the enormous popularity of the horror comics, Sheena was kicked off the front cover and out of the lead slot. These positions of honor now went to Ghost Gallery. Sheena was relegated to the rear of the book. Not that it helped much. JUMBO COMICS became a bi-monthly, then ceased publication with issue #167, April, 1953. And Sheena went with it.

So, she died in action; went down with the ship as it were. Not exactly the happiest of endings, but then, in a couple of more years the Comics Code was destined to appear on the scene, and I really doubt that Sheena,with her action packed and often bloody morality plays could have survived that crew of strait-laced puritans anyway.

I can't really feel too badly about Sheena's passing. She enjoyed a good run, fifteen years. Fifteen years of glorious action, roaming the savage jungles, fighting it out in a panarama of adventures any self respecting hero would be proud to claim. And she still lives on, fighting her heroic battles in the colored pulp pages of the back issues. Sheena will always be around. She is an eternal character with a universal appeal. Within the last few years we have been a minor rebirth in jungle girl imitators, and it is really not importable that the first, the original, the best of the jungle heroines could still make a triumphant return someday.

It would be a wonderful thing to see her swing into action again, facing the kind of degenerate villains we all loved to hate back during her golden years. I don't believe we've seen the end of the story just yet. I received a letter from Jerry Iger a couple of weeks ago, and he mentioned that he was working on a movie script, a movie script about Sheena, Queen of the Jungle. I'd really prefer to see Sheena live again in the pages of her own comic book, but at the same time I sure hope Jerry Iger can sell that script. It would be sort of fun, you know, to watch her in wide-screen cinimoscope and full glorious technicolor. Sort of a natural next step upward in her long and busy career. I don't believe we've heard the last of her, not just yet anyway. Sheena's out there, and someday, somewhere, she's going to make it back again. I'm sure she knows we'll all be waiting.